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**A HYMN TO DIONYSUS
AND OTHER POEMS**

MARGARET SACKVILLE

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A HYMN TO DIONYSUS
AND OTHER POEMS

A Hymn to Dionysus

AND OTHER POEMS

Margaret Sackville

BY

MARGARET SACKVILLE

“““

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To Effie

*No evanescent verse is mine;
Embalmed within the uncut page
You'll keep it, like some rare old wine,
Stored up against your failing age.*

*When, seated in an easy chair,
Your fire well poked, your candles lit,
You may, though only half aware,
Take up this book and open it.*

*And muse :—"The pages still uncut!
I meant to read it once, I know."
Then turning to the fly-leaf: "But—
Why—that was sixty years ago!"*

A Hymn to Dionysus

“ Spirit of fire and dew ! ”

THE night forgets the day.
There is no rumour left in any place
Of Morning wandering with her hair astray,
The fierce light flashing on the Moon's pale face,
Nor of the wild and evanescent pall
Spun for the Sun's reluctant funeral,
But all is quieted ;
And twilight, with soft touch and shimmering hands,
Weaves dim embroideries
Drawing pale threads of light from the still lands
And skies, ere yet all light and life is fled.

Yet in the bosom of the silent air
Not yet made evident, a presence hides—
Some strange, swift presence, god-like, which divides
The stillness everywhere,
Waiting the imperious hour that shall declare
The hidden and obscured divinity ;
For now the worn twilight
Seems as a prison holding strenuously

Some aching god from flight,
Who waits but the moon's coming to go free.

And now the moon dawns and her soft waves flow,
A dim persuasive flood
Touching the innermost heart of field and wood,
And those shy dreams which all day long crouched low,
Stir, and a hurry of wings
Starts, and the nightingale awakened sings,
Yet knows not why. The gloom,
No longer like a frigid sepulchre,
Echoes with sudden noise
The sound of raiment windblown and astir,
Laughter and shrill, sweet notes,
The exultation of a thousand throats,
Rapture which, drawing nearer and more near,
Night's brooding calm destroys.
Till us, us too, the imminent madness stings,
And in our hearts the unappeasable fire
Kindles, and lo! ours too is the desire
Of earth, we know her passion unconfessed,
We are bitten with life, we speak the language of earth,
Mighty importunate,
Of budding fields wherein the seeds wax great,
The throbbing vivid sap in branch and root,
And surging through all Nature half perceived
Spring's youngling heart wise and irresolute;
And on our lips has breathed
The inspiration of awakening days,

Pæans and stormy prayers and songs and praise
 And all our blood is leaping with the sod
 To meet the unseen god.

Yea, for the whole great earth is filled with thee,
 O, son of Semele!
 And all the air is full, for it is thou
 Who comest, and thy brow
 Bound round with vines is as a shaft to smite
 The crouching limbs of Night,
 And all things wake before thee, shiver and gleam,
 O Perfect! O Supreme!
 O Lord! whose wise and beautiful heart was wrought
 From the dear pauses of the earth's dim thought,
 When she conceived and fashioned the wild vine
 With slow imagination, bit by bit,
 Till, woven with the sinuous strength of it,
 Twin-born burst forth that marvellous life of thine.
 A god of fire and dew
 Art thou, a subtle god, fiery and cold,
 Young as the earth, old as the earth is old,
 Whom we must needs, even though we fear, pursue.
 Triumphantly and as a lord,
 Thou comest, not as once unknown, abhorred,
 Thou seeking Thebes did'st bring her perilous days,
 Seeing her heart, dull and unsanctified,
 Thy deity denied,
 And mocked thee with dull speech and atheist words,
 Till thou her all unworthy spirit rent

With awful punishment,
 Scattering her fortunate years like stricken birds
 To whom the arrow brings
 A sharp and evil death ;
 So didst thou leave her a body without breath,
 From whose drawn lips comes no more voice that sings,
 And no man heeds what words the strained mouth saith.

How in our hearts is madness brought to birth,
 O Dionysus ! we who all day long
 Spun out our lives like a monotonous song,
 Holding our tedious hours of little worth,
 Now gaining from our servitude reprieve,
 Rise from the mouldering feasts of pleasure and grief,
 By strange and unfamiliar voices led ;
 Casting our old lives, like a garment shed,
 Far from us, and all chains that mar and bind ;
 We daughters of the Wind,
 We, the Storm's children, follow in his tread,
 Goaded and torn and tost at the wind's will,
 With raging steps ascending high and higher,
 Scaling the flanks of some precipitous hill,
 Until, like vagrant leaves asunder tost,
 We lie dispersed where the hill summits wait
 For night to grow subdued and satiate,
 When with keen shafts draws near swift-winged Day,
 And makes our souls his prey.

What is thy will, O God !
 What is thy will, O God of wine and flame !

That thou shouldst leave us hungry and down-trod,
 Giving us grief for joy, for rapture shame?
 Yea, for thou too art pale, a sorrowful god.
 What ails thee, joining hands with grief, O Lord?
 What secret pain thy glorious heart has scored,
 What anguish, what desire, for joined to this
 Wild rapture and immeasurable bliss,
 We have seen, we have known awake within thine eyes,
 The shadows of a woe that never flies,
 Like storm-clouds watching where the sunset dies.
 And then we fear, since no divinity
 Save thee, and only thee,
 (And that wan goddess mother whose sick heart
 Was torn and pierced by many a bodeful dart)
 Has tasted woe or any bitterness,
 But cruel in beauty seen the restless world
 Down-trodden and down-hurled,
 And added mockery to its keen distress,
 Nor understood, but thou,
 Thou hast grown weary from too much loveliness
 Perchance, or broodest else upon sad ways
 Of Hades girt about with speechless days,
 Which thou hast trod, hearing nor prayer nor praise;
 And having tasted these things, still to thee
 May cling the unappeasable memory,
 So that thy heart is full of the earth's pain,
 The sorrow of perpetual travailing;
 Thy thoughts like cold, unprofitable rain
 Which beats upon the young vines newly sown

And often on the hills thy stern feet ring,
 And often Winter in thy breath is known,
 And often is thy heart hungry in vain.

Yea, but forget thy woes,
 O God! for we, we are hungry for delight,
 And thou a ruinous blight
 Hast cast upon our fullest joy, and made
 Our pleasure harsh as a malignant blade;
 For lo! we waking find upon our hands
 Blood, and our raiment red,
 And those whose soft mouths at our breasts have fed,
 The tender offspring of the spring-tide herds,
 Torn limb from limb, and over the green land
 The bloody entrails of the innocents slain
 Hither and thither tost.
 Wherefore despair our heavy spirit girds.
 Fruitless repentance and exceeding pain,
 And all our joy is lost
 In bitter silence, brooding without words—
 Sick desolation by no comfort crossed.

Thou art a dangerous and a difficult god;
 Yet must we follow, yet are we bound to thee,
 Though we should suffer, we too, that agony,
 That unendurable and perpetual woe,
 Which thou once angry gavest for a sign
 To stubborn and abominable men,
 Of thy most pitiless justice, wise, divine,

Even to the Thebans when
 The Queen Agavé tore
 Limb from fair limb that accurséd child she bore,
 Pentheus, who with blasphemous commands
 Mocked thee; then passed with madness in his breast
 By thee compelled, the godhead unconfessed,
 To where the women lay
 Upon the hills waiting the lagging day;
 Who having recognised an alien tread
 Sprang, even as blood-hounds spring,
 And holding his infidel life as a little thing,
 Mangled, and left him dead.
 His mother, too, whilst still the madness led
 Her throbbing thoughts astray,
 Laughing with victory, raised aloft his head,
 Deeming she had held a royal lion at bay,
 And bade all men rejoice.
 Dost thou forget, O God, how quickly fell
 Bitter despair upon her, and her voice
 Moaned with an anguish none might break or quell,
 When fearful recognition caused her mind
 To reel with impotent horror fierce and blind,
 When she beheld, aghast, her slaughtered son
 Dishonoured and undone?

Yea, lest such woe shall fall upon us, too,
 O pitiless God, thou whom we still pursue,
 Exulting whilst thy madness swells each vein,
 Give us, O Lord, whose soul is fire and dew,

Give us forgetfulness !
When thy extinguished light leaves only pain,
Torture profound, acute.
Yea, or make clean thy worship of all woe,
Melting thy spirit's sorrow even as snow
Melts, when accomplished time
Bids from earth's depths fair flowers and grasses climb.
But O, afflict us not,
Afflict us not, O God ! with such despair
As may be holy for a god to bear
But, being too fierce for mortals, scars and burns
Our bosoms with insatiable flame,
When no more sleep to the worn spirit turns,
And all life sinks in shame.
Grant us thy fervid speech, thy warm caress,
Thy brief, elusive presence and thy song,
The immediate life, the glory and might of thee,
Yet, O Desired ! O son of Semele !
When in our hearts no more thy will is strong,
Grant us forgetfulness,
Lest the cold shafts of thought shall work us wrong,
And all our lives consume with agony.

The Queen's Cabinet.

To Margaret

IN the Queen's cabinet
 A dim, uncertain strangeness lies ;
 Each hour before that hour is set
 Swoons as it goes, droops as it flies,
 As though such weight of heaviness
 Its slow, reluctant pinions bore,
 Pierced by such langourous distress
 It may not rise, nor any more
 Higher than the painted ceiling soar,
 Or the deep window's arched recess.

Faint perfumes tremble everywhere ;
 The sun's shafts, piercing the low pane,
 Pour a fierce flood of crimson stain
 On floor and wall, but pausing there
 Flicker with suddenly startled light,
 Recoiling in uncertain fear ;
 Some secret thing surely, laid bare,
 Has marred the strength of the sun's sight ;
 Some birth—some memory of night,
 Sprung from the darkness' cloudly brain,
 A shadow whereof the gloom is fain
 Linger on in day's despite,
 Wherewith the morning strives in vain,
 Strives with, but may not put to flight.

The panelled walls are overwrought
 With marvellous work of cunning art,
 The swift, illuminating thought
 Flashed from the workman's brain and heart,
 Has twined a net of twisted gold,
 Made rich with infinite device,
 Over the walls,—a brave design ;
 What subtle hand, wary and bold,
 Might thus translate and realize,
 Bidding so wonderfully rise
 In webs of implicated line,
 Those inspired forms the mind's depths hold,
 A visible joy to all men's eyes?
 The level floor is fashioned well
 With tiles of pleasant shape and hue,
 Wherein the fancy may pursue
 Colour of flower and of sea-shell ;
 So, too, the ceiling nobly planned,
 Is wrought by some compelling hand,
 Where every pleasant shade that is
 Mingles in perfect traceries.

The very shadows seem to stir
 On frightened feet, like things dismayed,
 Seeking before their hour to fade.
 There is no freshness in the air ;
 The hot, soft touch and sense of death
 Taints with contaminated breath
 Each careless wind that enters here.

Life seems than slumber heavier,
 With palsied limbs, silent and sere,
 And lips which no song quickeneth.

What does the Queen? Her long, white hands,
 Her beautiful and subtle face,
 Her gold hair braided in soft strands,
 Each movement's magical caress,
 Her measured speech, where one can trace
 An echo from some far-off place,
 A memory of other lands,
 Are laden with a rhythmic grace
 Languid and sweet. What does the Queen?
 See how the heavy velvet sweeps
 Its splendid weight of crimson sheen
 Around the body's loveliness,
 Deliberate and imperial.
 The heavy robe a girdle keeps
 Under her bosom, then lets fall
 A sudden flood of drapery down;
 The faint jewels flashing in her crown
 Are like the bubbles leaping up
 To the cup's edge in a wrought cup,
 Which flash a moment and then drown.

Who shall say whether on hate or love
 Her great eyes brood 'twixt lid and lid,
 Or what within their depths lie hid—
 Passion or joy or grief or fear?
 Fathom them not—forbear, forbear!

Draw not the shadowy veil that lies
 Over the secrets of those eyes,
 Lest some indefinite gulf shall be
 Stretching beneath,—some dread abyss,
 A place of perilous mysteries.
 How quietly the lashes move,
 Like shadows threatening storm above
 The stillness of a tired sea.

This is a palace built for kings,
 Compounded of all loveliness.
 Watch how the outer walls express
 A varied opulence that flings
 Careless its beauty to all eyes,
 Yet still in meet obedience lies
 To incommunicable laws.
 The patient stone dissolves and thaws,
 Expressing what the thoughts devise.
 From balustrade to balustrade
 The leaping of the perfect line,
 Each light and soaring pinnacle,
 The sinuous arches' rise and swell,
 And every separate balcony,
 Each moulded with some new surprise,
 The columns, insolent and free,
 Like clear, melodious notes combine
 Into one perfect harmony.
 So, too, the flowing staircase caught
 By sudden inspiration—yea,

As though the mastery of thought
 Plied without hands the willing stone,
 And the swift spirit wrought alone
 Nor knew the body's slow delay ;
 Each step a soaring miracle
 Scales the high places of man's mood
 To where in gracious solitude
 His most beloved creations dwell.

Like some exotic, perfumed flower,
 The palace spreads—each several room
 A petal laden with perfume,
 Sheltered from fear of the wind's power ;
 And even as moths and butterflies
 Live and are glad from hour to hour,
 With pinions dipped in splendid dyes,
 A never failing pageantry
 Of glorious ladies and great lords,
 Sweep by and pass and pass again,
 And with fair converse is time slain,
 And gorgeous gems and jewelled swords,
 And laughter and soft instruments,
 Love and intoxicating scents,
 Delicious music and low words.
 Here delight sojourns and drinks up
 Each moment from the moment's cup ;
 Pleasure is here which knows no bound,
 Quick passions and swift gusts of flame,
 Dreams that are fair, deeds that are shame.

A sweet bewilderment of sound ;
 A fiery day, full of strange light ;
 A fierce and shining interval
 Between the passing centuries,
 Strong to delight, strong to appal ;
 A torch tossed up through a dark night ;
 All life's delectable vintages,
 Dear to men's mouths, poured forth and lost,
 Among the scattered foam flakes tossed
 On Time's grey shores by the grey seas.

This is a palace built for kings ;
 Only a king may know how fares
 He that by certain secret stairs
 Descends, or whither the staircase springs ;
 Let him who knows declare it not,
 Lest he shall be as one forgot ;
 There is a place where such men lie,
 In the earth's womb, far from the sky ;
 And whoso issues forth therefrom
 Has but a dark and cheerless home,
 Perchance in the cold river's bed,
 And many there are whose mirth is fled,
 Above whose sleep the waters move
 Who would discourse strangely thereon,
 Were not their life's good days undone.
 Whom now men think but little of.

Ah ! think upon such things no more,

Life's gifts are fairer than those of death,
 Fruit that is rotten at the core
 Is past, and none remembereth.
 Better forget, better to be
 Wrapped round with mirth and minstrelsy
 And that adventurous life re-risen,
 Like dawn from out its antique prison.
 Ah! the swift flush of changing hues
 Through hall and garden sweeping by,
 As though the suddenly smitten sky
 Let all its rainbow torrents loose
 Upon the earth—better to choose
 Song, and the ministering of love,
 The shining labyrinths thereof,
 Is there not here store and enough?
 Drink the bright, perishable pain,
 Drink for ye die—from fervent springs
 Drink though the sweet grow wearisome,
 Pause not nor fail—all else is vain.
 Be sure the ultimate rest will come.
 This is a palace built for kings.

Here also is a cabinet,
 Wherein even as a jewel set
 In curious work of woven gold,
 A Queen sits, strange and beautiful.
 The sudden rush of fold on fold
 Of her robes crimson fall, the dull,
 Gold clasps of a wrought girdle hold.

The glory of her hair's long strands
 Burns like low flame where the jewels press.
 As though from very weariness
 Her eyelids droop and her white hands.
 What does the Queen ? Sometimes her feet
 Move with a quiet and languid tread
 Towards a certain panel led,
 Which, even as her fingers beat
 And grope upon the gold-traced wall,
 Gapes with a sudden opening.
 Surely the swift spring's noiseless fall
 Has given to light some precious thing ?
 Small phials are there wherein flame glows
 Each like a deep delirious gem,
 The hidden virtue hid in them
 Their marvellous might, this the Queen knows.
 Do they, too, know, who wend their way
 Radiantly clad 'twixt night and day,
 The lady, full of life and fire,
 Suddenly faint and fallen wan ;
 The heat of infinite desire
 Extinguished in a little span ;
 The lord and all his fame in love ?
 Oh, ask no more, it is enough ;
 Fear thou the heavy shade that clings,
 The dim oppression of the room.
 What ails thee with thy questionings ?
 Seek not to probe 'twixt gloom and gloom—
 This is a palace built for kings.

Philomela and Procne

To Katharine

ARGUMENT.

King Tereus of Thrace having wedded Procne, and afterwards, being smitten with love for her sister Philomela, and desiring her as his wife, that he may best accomplish his purpose makes semblance that the Queen is dead, and imprisons her with great cruelty. But Philomela having come to Thrace, and gaining, through secret knowledge, access to her sister, plans to slay the son of Tereus and Procne, Itylus, and serve him as meat before his father, thus avenging the King's treachery. Which was afterwards done; but the gods, detesting such a crime, transformed Philomela to a nightingale and Procne to a swallow.

PHILOMELA.

WHAT greeting shall there be betwixt us twain?
 There is no word to utter—for most vain
 Were any happy leaping of the blood
 Or sweet reminder of our sisterhood,
 Which floats adrift with those lost spars that swim
 On the torn ocean of our lives—a dim
 And obscure whirl of waters. Only this
 Good to thine ears shall sound, that in me is
 Strength dumb, inflexible, certain. I am all steel.
 I cannot understand nor speak, nor feel
 Aught save one word of vengeance. Thus winds rouse
 Low threatening echoes in an empty house,

Else wholly silent ; and your wrong shall be,
 Sister, so perfectly avenged by me,
 Who am grown no more a woman, that the greed
 Of our tremendous hate, perchance, may need
 No more to satiate its hunger. Yet
 I know not what may drive it to forget
 Or make it unavailing.

PROCNE.

When they cried

Saying, " Behold there come
 Great ships, white ships, fair ships across the sea,
 Because King Tereus chooses a fresh Bride,
 And she speeds hither on a favouring tide,
 A Queen, but very pale,
 Like some doomed lady in an ancient tale "—
 Then with an effort I remembered home,
 Which I had long forgotten, and I made
 Haste to arouse me and up-braid
 My hair, because my breast was full of sweet
 Thoughts, and I said, " Even thus and thus her feet
 Will fall, like Summer's, on a weary land
 Which long has prayed for her,
 Crowned and divine, a radiant wanderer,
 The world's joy in her hand."

PHILOMELA.

What words are these, and wherefore is thy head
 Unveiled, and art thou wholly perished,
 Made of no use ?

PROCNE.

Full in my face
 Blew those un pitying
 And frozen winds, which spread an angry wing
 Over the barren hills of Thrace.
 Ah! woe!
 For all that grief and melancholy thought
 The grievous gods have wrought
 Surely was shed about me, yet I know
 That these griefs vanished long ago,
 And now, like very gentle ghosts,
 If I should call would come,
 Even as fallen hosts
 Of armies, being long dead, might wander over
 The once red fields which now thick grasses cover,
 Calm hearted, glad the battle's voice is dumb.

PHILOMELA.

Sister, my anger crushes,
 Consumes and maddens me.
 I am Death's very hand-maiden. I toss,
 A mighty river none may cross,
 Which unimpeded rushes
 Torn, frantic to the sea.

PROCNE.

Ah, me! The Thracian wind
 Which moans upon the hills—
 It blew upon my heart; that which it chills

Grows faint and frail and blind—
 Thus my heart perished and forgot its ills.
 It was so good
 To feel no more that swaying of the blood
 Which leaps, intoxicates and kills.
 No more the stretched nerves, worn and tense,
 But a soft slumber born of innocence,
 Soothing and slaying perfectly for me
 That foe inevitable,
 Which I alone could never hope to quell,
 Even my memory.

Ah, sister, canst thou dream
 As I do of great chambers, where
 Cool-handed maidens spin,
 Gazing the while over unruffled seas,
 Day out, day in,
 Bright, marvellous tapestries
 Which picture many things that mortals fear,
 And yet so daintily devised
 Men there may see old sorrows realised
 Without a tear?
 Sister, I hear the thread
 Whisper between their fingers, and the sound,
 Whilst all things lie in drowsy calm around,
 Soothes the worn heart and the worn head.

Also I hold it true
 The shining God of day,

Even Apollo, rose elate and slew
 Falsehood and foul decay,
 Distrust and every form of wrong,
 When against that snake, seven times coiled—the world—
 He from his glittering quiver drew
 And poised aloft and hurled
 A golden dart of song.
 Wherefore speak not as though
 This evil still had power, lest he,
 The great God, be wroth with thee
 And lay thee low.

PHILOMELA.

Cast from thy brows
 That crown that doth beseem thee not, cast down,
 I pray thee, that Queen's crown.
 Shame of our house,
 Oh thou, whom the storms have scattered and up-torn!
 For as no great Queen art thou—who should scorn
 The last, fierce wrench of anguish, nor reply
 To the taunting of base griefs, nor deign to die
 To ease her torment even, but should make
 Tools of her manifold sorrows—for vengeance' sake
 Or for the sake of some large thing, not stoop
 Once as thou, O most fallen, who dost droop
 A wasted thing. Whereunto may I lay hold
 To wake that spirit that was thine of old,
 Most brave and regal? Say, hast thou not trod
 Life's perilous places like a very god?
 How have they broken thee!

PROCNE (*not heeding*).

Is not this best,

And of all things the happiest—
 A swallow which sees not the sere,
 Woeful face of the spent year,
 But in her glad moods waits on her?
 When my heart died in my breast,
 I think enough of life remained
 To bid it faintly put forth wings,
 And now the slow, sweet life-blood stings,
 Which many deemed had wholly waned,
 Sending it forth a bird confessed.
 I think that when the Summer yields
 Her golden gardens and bright fields
 To bitter silent autumn—then
 My heart will wholly wake again,
 A wild-winged swallow, and leave this cold
 Body vacant, shrunk and dead,
 Like a nest grown old,
 Bare, untenanted.
 Flying wheresoe'er it craves,
 Over the white, dancing waves,
 Building, it may be, its nest
 In those fortunate far isles,
 Where life not treacherously smiles—
 'Those famed islands of the Blest.

Sister, it will travel far,
 Poised upon the highest mast

Of some ship laden with spice
 Bound on some brave enterprise,
 Crowned with splendid spoils at last.

Or in some secret wood that is
 Clothed with Spring perpetual,
 Where close shadows coolly fall
 Round a pool whose waters kiss
 The ever virginal,
 Bright limbs of Artemis.

PHILOMELA.

And all thy words are vain, and I
 Am as those fields deep under snow which lie
 Dead, till they catch the fiery dreadful glow
 Of a fierce Winter sunset—and the snow
 Most drearily reflects the light; thus hate
 Kindles this life of mine, else a dead weight
 Of snow, barren forever. Tell to me,
 Sister, this one thing—what of thy child, for he
 Is what I seek for?

PROCNE.

Why wilt thou break
 On my dreams, and ah! it is wrong to wake
 That old foe, my memory.
 For, Sister, Sister, I had forgotten
 That a child was born to me.
 Yet is he fair with pleasant ways,
 The light of morning in his face,

And the light of the laughing seas ;
 A golden fruit which the gods cast down
 From their heavenly banquetting.
 I know not where such fair fruits spring ;
 Scarcely on those mystic trees,
 Those trees which golden apples crown
 In the still land of the Hesperides.
 Sister, he is small of limb ;
 I pray you be not over wrath,
 But very gracious unto him ;
 And for that sweetness that he hath
 Trouble him not with angry words.
 He is as timid as the birds
 Which hither and thither dart and skim
 In the woods about your path.
(*She moves away*).

PHILOMELA.

I pray the gods to grant me threefold pain
 To brace each nerve and sinew, let each vein
 Flow with fresh torment—thus shall I fulfil
 The strong commands of my sufficient will.
 For lo, he whom I hate shall eat
 Abominable food and taste as meat,
 Ah, me ! such flesh that through all time shall be
 Witness thereof ; and afterwards to me
 What happens the gods care little, nor do I
 Care anything—for all things broken lie
 Round us and hatefully compass us about.
 Thus shall the torches of our lives flare out.

A Ballad of Change.

(After the manner of Villon).

O WHERE is Greece and all her power,
 Her songs and her philosophy,
 Her gods who shed a golden shower
 Of beauty over earth and sea ?
 All past, all vanished utterly ;
 Plato, the great Republican,
 Aspasia eke and Pericles :
 Time lays them all beneath his ban ;--
 And every man shall pass as these.

And where is Rome, magnificent,
 Who spurned the world beneath her feet,
 Who homage from all peoples rent,
 And gave men war for drink and meat ?
 What hand has hurled her from her seat ?
 What missile slain her emperors ?
 Fallen her ancient territories,
 The fruit of ail her crimes and wars ;
 And every man shall pass as these.

What of those kingdoms of the world,
 Macedon, Egypt, India ?
 The glory of their strength is furled,
 Their splendour flamed, then passed away.
 One day succeeds another day
 And scarcely hears the last day's call.
 All powers and principalities
 Sink grey and dead, and vanish all ;—
 And every man shall pass as these.

Wherefore, lest man shall grow elate,
 I pray the gods may grant him wit
 To realise his helpless state
 And see perchance the jest of it ;
 Perceiving well how bit by bit
 The world's whole wealth and enterprise,
 Its lusts and poms and pageantries,
 Fade, and are lost beyond surmise ;—
 And every man shall pass as these.

Envoi.

Time, that supreme iconoclast,
 Will overthrow all images.
 There is not one thing that shall last,
 And every man shall pass as these.

Morgan le Fay.

The Hall of a Great Castle.

THE QUEEN.

Now is the time when thou must rise and leave,
 O daughter, these dark halls and winds that grieve
 Continually, and these most desolate ways.
 For I have filled with wisdom all thy days,
 And thou art learned in strange imaginings,
 And thy great knowledge round about thee clings
 Not to be cast aside. Lo ! thou shalt take
 Men's souls into thy hands, and for thy sake
 They shall be as threads, and thou shalt weave from these
 Various and many coloured tapestries
 Wherewith to clothe thy beauty. Sorrowful
 Shall be men's days because of thee, and dull
 And grey as ashes ; and the world shall fade
 Like a spent flower whereon the sun has laid
 A flaming kiss ; for thou art fashioned
 From all most powerful sorceries and dread
 Cries of the night wind, and the heart of night,

And lamentation of the chill twilight,
 And from the spirit of all things forlorn,
 Aloof and secret. Thou shalt put to scorn,
 By the slow, shadowy wonder of thy smile,
 Those things whereof men boast a little while,
 Then lose for ever. This thy doom shall be,
 Daughter, to draw a chill mist stealthily
 Over the aching limbs in slumber furled,
 And closed eyes of the unremembering world.

MORGAN.

Why is my doom so interwrought with death ?

THE QUEEN.

No mortal life thy bosom quickeneth,
 But cloudy spirits of autumnal skies
 Love thee, and those which rise when the winds rise,
 And spirits gustily sweeping with the rain
 Over chill lands—all things which work men's bane,
 All once triumphant things, now fallen and cold,
 Possess thee, yea, for these through thee would hold
 Dominion still above mankind, and these
 Being jealous that man should know a little ease,
 Should love the sun a little, and be glad
 Some few, short hours, wrought thee to make him mad,
 And thou art born a link 'twixt them and him—
 A fierce enchantress, yet remote and dim,
 Whose nature none may know—more than the drear,

Wild soul is known of the departing year,
 Splendid, yet than all loneliness lonelier.
 Thou shalt work all things subtly to thy will ;
 Yet, as a magic cup no hand may fill,
 All the world's passionate glory and its pride,
 Shalt drink and be for ever unsatisfied.

MORGAN.

My heart detests the shadows ; thou hast wrought
 Too sadly this great knowledge, and my thought
 Loathes that obscure and lifeless world, and I
 Would hurl this knowledge from me, verily,
 Into some dark abyss and live as one
 Who has been blind, then looks upon the sun,
 Who, having heard not, by some glad chance hears
 Man's speech again. I would forget those years
 Wherein I have learnt too well, and understood
 Too well the loneliness of hill and wood
 And desolation of the storm-swept night.
 Ah ! me, where hast thou lost my youth's delight ?
 What hast thou done, O Mother, with my youth ?
 For sad it is if I must bear in truth
 The hazardous burden of my heritage.
 Hast thou no portion wherewith to assuage
 This unfamiliar grief which falls on me ?

THE QUEEN.

Lo, thou art young, and hesitatingly
 Standest within strange ways thou knowest not well ;

And yet thy doom is unescapable,
 And thou shalt love it in a little space
 And laugh to see all things, even love, give place
 To thee. The exaltation of thy doom
 Shall fill thee. In a little while this gloom
 Enfolding thee shall quiver into flame.
 For at thy birth, O daughter, towards me came
 Phantoms of perished queens, for whom the earth
 Seemed as a casket laden at their birth
 With all exorbitant gifts—whose loveliness
 But flickers as a flame, now great, now less,
 Not utterly to fail for evermore.
 And each of these some splendour that she bore
 Once, left with thee, so that thou mayest not choose
 Thy destiny, nor canst thou surely lose
 Those great dread gifts they brought thee. Impotent,
 In this alone—no utter discontent
 Of thine shall make their purpose incomplete,
 Nor change the road made ready for thy feet.

MORGAN.

There are many roads and many wanderings,
 And I shall weary of the night that brings
 Never repose, and never yet repose,
 And the long fevered day which may not close
 For many sleepless hours. Alas! what days
 On the interminable world's highways,
 Must I now spend, and many who toil shall rest,
 Having no quenchless life within their breast,

Who may live, nor fill the world with sorrowing,
 Who are born and die as some sweet day in Spring,
 Pleasant and without storm from birth to close.
 But I who know those secrets sorrow knows,
 And wild, sad wisdom of foregone loveliness—
 Shall I find any pathway good to press,
 Or any place, where for one moment whole,
 I may suffice the fever of my soul?

THE QUEEN (*offering a goblet*).

Drink this, O ! Daughter : this shall comfort thee.
 (*Morgan drinks.*)

MORGAN.

I am awake, the whole world calls to me.
 What do I here ? My old life passes and fades
 To shadow. What have I to do with shades ?
 My feet are tangled in a golden net.
 Ah ! the great crown which round my brows is set !
 The power of many ages lives in me,
 Yea, in my hands I hold, I hold the key
 Of time's most hidden, ultimate sanctuary.
 I will bind the earth in immemorial bands,
 I will hold it as a fruit betwixt my hands,
 I will swing it as a censer filled with fire
 For ever, yea, it shall bend to my desire,
 Yea, and its beating heart at length be still
 Before my magic irresistible.

(*She goes out.*)

THE QUEEN.

The cold and melancholy winds lie close
Within her heart, and ancient battle throes ;
The silent breath of sleeping woods, the voice
Of unquiet years, which, dying not, rejoice
To trouble the live hours and the new years
With echoes of past wars and clashing spears,
And the forgotten, melancholy gleams
Of old, extinguished sunsets. And she seems,
The visible manifestation of dead strife,
Which still is fain to be avenged of life.

Sunset

A SULLEN mass of gold, the sky
Broods lowering on approaching night,
Who, half afeared, stands timorous by,
Falters, nor dares to close in fight
With savage and exultant day—
A wounded Titaness at bay.

Subdued at last, the fierce sun slips
Below the horizon's shadowy rim,
Cleaving with strained and bleeding lips,
Yet to that goblet's burning brim,
Which, emptied of day's draught divine,
Night fills with dark, reluctant wine.

Clouds of strange shape and portent dire
Close round the sunset, winged and curled,
As though from out a gulf of fire
Great rocks some giant hand had hurled—
Huge bulks, immeasurable forms,
The progeny of tides and storms.

Surging and sweeping through the breast
 Of earth unwonted trouble flows,
 And flickering watch fires in the West
 Alert, spy out for hidden foes.
 Round the woods some terror cleaves
 And broken murmurs stir the leaves.

Perchance this hour old ages live,
 Dreadful with fire and sword again,
 And night's most powerful sorceries give
 Life to the soul of centuries slain—
 The indestructible years that lie
 Cloven and bruised but cannot die.

Surely the eager breath inspires
 Of some old kingdom cast aside
 Glad with the heat of battle fires,
 With quivering lip and nostrils wide,
 Drunk with strong draughts of wine and fame,
 These sweeping trails of parted flame.

From what long fallen temple blown,
 Where with pale lips and half-closed eyes,
 Girt round with gold and jewelled zone,
 Stained with immediate sacrifice,
 The priest stood, making the night dumb
 With terror—has a rumour come?

Hast thou not smitten with strong rods

O ! Time, thy foemen vanquishèd ?
Of all life's mighty periods,

Remains there any that is not dead ?
Old conquerors of lands and seas,
Hast thou not given to death all these ?

Nay, for to-night the conquered rise.

See the old sap in root and stem
Lives, and thy bonds their limbs despise,
The spirit of night is filled with them,
The heavens are crimson with their blood,
The air heaves with their multitude.

O ! weakling Time, that canst not dull

The soul of those thou wouldst possess !
'Tis we who in the present cull

Thy fruits of wrath and bitterness.
We are thy slaves, days that are past
Escape thy tyrant rule at last.

See the night passes. Dreadful morn,

Stern, bloodless porter of the East,
How shall earth crouch in huddled scorn

Among the fragments of her feast !
What veil shall hide, what power shall screen,
After the passion that has been ?

See the night passes. Morn appears
Calm, steadfast, and the fields revive,
Patiently earth the signal hears,
Life answering shouts awake, alive.
And for night's glamour?—every way
The broad light of accustomed day.

The Return

THE LADY.

LIKE heavy mists which cleave about
Still waters, so the ignorant years
Closed round me ; yea, my soul with drought
Was parched, and as a fire which rears
Its golden crests of quivering light,
Then sinks and is no more at all,
But the bright flames grow dull and fall
Dark on the darkness of the night,
So my life flickered and went out.
Ah ! me, Beloved, on what shore
Upon the very brink of the world
Past love and all remembering
Could'st thou forget, and think no more
How I, my life's good days upfurled,
Grew weary for thy home coming ?

THE KNIGHT.

First through interminable ways,
Dim forest ways I passed, and then

Over a plain untrodden of men
 I wandered for uncertain days,
 And came at last to a far land
 Upon the edge of a wide sea,
 And there I saw a castle stand,
 And entered there, but all to me
 Is vague and fleeting as shades which gleam
 And fade and shimmer through a dream
 Whereof remains no memory.

THE LADY.

Surely, Beloved, long turmoil
 And many an anxious, woeful fight
 And hunger and thirst and the battle coil
 Have cast a sickness over thy sight,
 And lighted a fever in thy breast.
 But now, from thy labour saved and freed,
 —Whatever thou hast lost or won,—
 Beloved, the time has come for rest.
 Ah! bid the evil past recede,
 For the past is heavy and grief-oppressed,
 A dreary thing to gaze upon.

THE KNIGHT.

I have wandered long and over long,
 And, Lady, you have gracious eyes,
 And, Lady, I deem that you are wise;

Though whether I know you or know you not
 Is scarcely clear to me in sooth,
 For my life is veiled and half forgot,
 Like the lost tune of an old song,
 Like a fallen fruit from the tree of youth.
 And I fain would know why now always
 The world withers, the world decays,
 And the teeth of Autumn, sullen and sere,
 Meet in the flesh of the feeble year;
 And if for ever the wind's dull pain
 Shall sound, and the harsh, cold drip of the rain,
 And never the Spring return again?

THE LADY.

Some weary shadow is over thee,
 Yet sleep and forget thy wretchedness,
 Then wake, Beloved, then wake and see
 How even now the Spring's feet press
 Glad wild fields, where the winds roam free,
 And the waste ways and the wilderness.

THE KNIGHT.

Who may rest from the sound of the wind?
 Who may sleep and remember no more
 The many roads that stretch behind,
 The many roads that stretch before,
 And all his labour heretofore?

THE LADY.

Speak not, think not, but give to me
Thy helmet, yea, and I bid thee yield
Into my hand thy spear and shield,
Thy spear and shield into my hand.
Lover of mine; this I command,
That thou rest thy soul from its misery.

THE KNIGHT.

I left my spear in the deep grass
Circling a pool. I left my shield
There also—into the pool it fell
And I was glad when I saw it fall:
Lady, a heavy burden it was.
Also my spear was heavy to wield.
When I cast it from me it was well,
And now I need it no more at all.

THE LADY.

What sad enchantment, my lord, my lord,
Has changed thee thus—where hast thou strayed?
And is there blood on thy keen sword blade?
Or is it rust that stains thy sword?

THE KNIGHT.

If one should come to a far sea shore,
And seeing a castle great and fair,

And being weary would enter there,
 Sick with labour and travel sore,
 I bid him most surely enter not ;
 For there shall he find sweetness, and then
 Not sweetness any more again ;
 And love, and then foul shades which blot
 His very soul out ; hunger and thirst,
 Hunger and thirst unsatisfied,
 And a barren world on every side,
 And the day accursed and the night accursed,
 And life for foe and death for friend,
 With a desperate pilgrimage to ride,
 But never a bed at his journey's end.

THE LADY.

But if thou hast found an alien love
 But if alien kisses are on thy mouth,
 I know not what thou wouldst seek for here,
 Some wild, new fruit thou hast tasted of ;
 And my vines once glad with the sun of the South,
 I think will bear no grapes this year.

THE KNIGHT.

I have come because the sound of the rain
 Torments me, yea, and a cold wind blows
 About me always. I have not slept
 For very long, and I come again
 Because I remembered that tired eyes close

In slumber here—and hither I crept,
Thinking perchance to forget my pain
A little while, for the nights are deep
And silent and long and unbroken here,
And the bitter tongues of the waning year
May cease for a while—and I shall sleep.

Peirithous

Characters:

PEIRITHOUS

THESEUS

HERAKLES

SYNOPSIS.

Peirithous loved Persephone, descending into Hades to bear her thence. As punishment he was fettered to a rock and guarded by a serpent. Theseus, his friend, who had accompanied him into Hades, refused to leave him during his torment, and remained beside him, till Herakles, being touched by the devotion of Theseus, obtained the release of Peirithous, and they returned together again to earth.

This story formed the plot of one of the lost tragedies of Euripides, and is given by Mr. Gilbert Murray in his Appendix on the lost tragedies, in Vol. III. of "The Athenian Drama."

SCENE: *Hades. Peirithous is chained to a rock guarded by the serpent. Theseus, unfettered, watches beside him.*

THESEUS.

AH, me! what sorrow is upon thee, friend,
Who endurest things beyond the dreams of man!

PEIRITHOUS.

I should be glad a little if the slow
 Shimmer of twilight faded into night
 And utter darkness fell. For I am tired
 More than all else of thin and flickering shades
 Which pass and pass for ever, and I tire
 Of those dull, sleeping serpent coils half seen
 'Twixt rock and rock, and terribly my flesh
 Anticipates the gliding forth of them—
 The cold deliberate fangs which feed and slay not,
 That horror which shall make its prey of me.
 Also I tire of thy sad, patient face;
 And if the darkness fell my eyes would close;
 And I should certainly forget these things
 And slumber, being so full of weariness.
 But now I stare through the unwelcome light
 Unwillingly, and may nor sleep nor rest,
 Loathing dilates my eyeballs: it were good
 To close the lids above my weary eyes.

THESEUS.

What comfort shall I bring to thee, O friend,
 For silent are the pleasant words of earth;
 And here the shadows turn all things to shade,
 Jealous of shining speech and passionate blood.
 Yet this one thing they surely shall not change—
 It shoots a flame straight from the heart of death,
 It binds us still with living links to life,
 My love, which no cold god shall make afraid.

Would it might feed thee, would it might nourish thee,
 Would it might salve thy torment, and defeat
 The malice and the bitterness of Hell!

PEIRITHOUS.

How art thou too, thou too, amongst the dead?
 Thou hast not sinned, one sin is punished thus,
 And that sin have I sinned. Art thou not Theseus
 Whose sad and patient face has haunted me
 Through the long moments of a fever dream
 Which now for many centuries I have dreamed.
 Art thou, too, dead, who hast a living voice,
 Stormy and full of sunlight? For I knew thee
 Once when a sound of winds was in my ears
 And sense of palpable earth beneath my feet,
 And loved thee: yet a faded memory,
 A cloudy and a misty shape art thou,
 And I would know what bond constrains thee here,
 And what inexorable cords of death
 Are wound about thy living feet and hands.

THESEUS.

I have watched beside thee all the bitter hours
 Of thy great torment, yet thou knewest me not.
 I have seen the torture of thy sleepless eyes
 And felt the burden and trouble of thy soul
 Madden my spirit. I have understood
 When dreadful quiet sealed thy moaning voice
 How silence may corrode. I waited still

The ending of thy madness. Think, O friend,
 If thou hadst waked and known in all this place
 Nought but the shadows—with the solitude
 And thy distraught and desolated soul
 Alone for ever. Not the golden earth,
 Nor flashing waves, nor clear, imperious winds
 Were bearable to me who knew thy grief.
 Also some sweet, frail memory of joy
 I may uplift towards thee and of years
 We have lived gloriously—when each new day
 Seemed an untamed strong steed of race divine
 Which we from dawn to sunset fearless rode
 Alive, exulting. Lo! my strength excels
 The cold contamination of this place;
 I suffer not save in thy suffering.
 Ah! did I leave thee, that were surely death.
 But now I fear no vain and fangless shades,
 Nor the cold anger of funereal gods.

PEIRITHOUS.

I ever yearned with love ungovernable
 Wildly towards things which burn with too fierce flame,
 Such as a god may hunger for and live,
 But if a man desires, he may not live.
 With flash and thunder of exultant seas
 My dreams were mingled, with the breaking day
 And windy laughter of the storm-clasped hills.
 I scorned the reasonable bounds of life;
 Therefore the gods have smitten me and slain.

With strange and perilous love they girded me,
 And fatally I loved the Queen of Death.
 Yea! with audacious passion clove in thought
 Even to Persephone, the Queen of Death.
 And thus I sought through unpermitted paths,
 Being yet alive, the loveless lands of sleep,
 And came to Hell, and even to that obscure
 Sad palace of intolerable death
 I came, and saw Persephone enthroned,
 The unimaginable, dreadful face,
 The awful brows, the changeless eyes—and knew
 My punishment, and my whole life sank dead
 Within me, and I now have no desire
 For aught save blindness, that I may not see
 The doubtful shining of the serpent coils
 Nor the unceasing shadows any more.

THESEUS.

We came together to the gates of Hell,
 Thou in thy madness. I, who knew no word
 Might set thee free from thy importunate dream,
 Followed in silence. Yea, and I, too, gazed
 Upon the unimaginable face,
 The dreadful countenance of Persephone.
 Yet still unpunished I, because no power
 Has she on those filled with essential life;
 And in my spirit life exuberant flames.
 But thou hadst wholly given thyself to her,
 An absolute oblation—yea, and smote

Most dreadfully on her from the living world,
 Wherefore she punished thee, and loathed that strong,
 Rash love of thine which woke her fretful blood
 With sudden hints of earth, and stirred anew
 Her ancient half-obliterated pain.
 For utterly would she forget these things;
 Therefore the less from deity enraged
 Than for this anguish of old grief revived,
 And unfamiliar pangs of tenderness
 She hates thee, and will cleave thee with her hate.
 Yet surely thy long grief shall end at last.

PEIRITHOUS.

It shall not end—not till the end of all.
 My sorrow must endure;
 It is eternal—the one certain thing.
 How shall imagination compass it?
 Thou canst not know it. Only those grey gods
 Know it who wove the vesture of my life
 And bitterly triumph, having wrought a grief
 So wholly strong, which shall outlast all time.

THESEUS.

Ah, friend, a glimmer as of distant dawn.
 Yea, and a stir of unfamiliar light.

PEIRITHOUS.

I have grown jealous of all lifeless things,
 Stones which indifferent receive the sun,

The irresponsive waves which, being free,
 Rejoice not, and the unremembering earth,
 Day's careless hands which spill and waste the light,
 The palsied, unawakened hearts of men.

THESEUS.

Oh ! see like smoke the shades dissolve,—the gloom
 Torn by some faint and glimmering wind apart !

PEIRITHOUS.

It is the dawn of some new punishment.

THESEUS.

And one who unobscured moves through the mist.

PEIRITHOUS.

More than the loathed gloom I fear this thing.

THESEUS.

The wild, keen scent of forests and of seas
 Smites me—and towards the sun I lift my face.

PEIRITHOUS.

This is some subtler and supreamer pain.

THESEUS.

Ah ! what strong god is this that us-ward moves ?
(Herakles approaches.)

HERAKLES.

I, Herakles, bear words of gladness to you.

PEIRITHOUS.

What word of gladness can Hell's heart conceive?

THESEUS.

And will the gods delude us with vain speech?

HERAKLES.

Thou, Peirithous, seeing most impiously,
 Didst dare a thing not to be dreamed of man,
 Audaciously descending into Hell,
 Thence to compel the Queen Persephone,
 Hast borne a mighty and just punishment,
 Though than thy sin less mighty; yet because
 Theseus magnificent in soul has bound
 His spirit with the bondage of the dead,
 Rejoicing to be near and share thy grief,
 And also since all wide, impatient hearts
 Are dear to me, and largely hast thou sinned
 Not with th' habitual weakness of mankind—
 I, having come to Hell, sought and obtained
 Thy freedom; wherefore I strike these fetters from thee.
 Rise and depart, and seek the earth again,
 Praising with humble heart the gracious gods.

PEIRITHOUS.

Ah, stay thy hand, have mercy, unbind me not!

HERAKLES.

What, is thy bondage, then, so sweet to thee?

PEIRITHOUS.

How may I pass back to the earth again?
 For now, when I most lamentably craved
 The sun, I had forgotten that above
 There comes no rumour and no sense of her,
 And I would rather through all time endure
 In darkness, knowing that this whole, waste land,
 Is ruled by her, and I
 A deathless dweller in the land she rules.

HERAKLES.

Refrain thy speech, lest, angry, the gods turn
 Thy words to bitterer strokes of chastisement.

THESEUS.

It is some frenzy, born of his long woe.
 Yet when he feels the earth beneath his feet,
 And the dear clasp of long familiar hands,
 His hungry madness will be quenched for ever.

PEIRITHOUS.

This is the ultimate vengeance of the gods;
 For now at least the splendour of my pain
 Lives in me with consuming consciousness.
 But when my wretched sojourn in the world
 Shall end, and I return again to Hell,
 I shall become impoverished, a mere shade,
 And this dear passion shall be quenched in me.

I shall be like a cold funereal urn
 Holding dead ashes—yet myself not dead
 Entirely, since most bitterly the shades
 In whom life gathered with excessive flame
 Feel the dull void of irretrievable loss
 For ever. Ah ! those hated gulfs of sleep
 Unvital, which devour all vital things,
 For now I may not live nor wholly die,
 I may not live nor wholly die again.

HERAKLES.

The gods, their gifts rejected, cannot take
 Again those gifts rejected to themselves ;
 O ! Peirithous ; and thou hast wrought and fallen.
 Too greedy wert thou for life, and snatched at death,
 And neither from life nor death comes good to thee,
 And from thy bonds I free thee, yet from bonds
 Of thy great anguish I may free thee not ;
 For dreadful are the laws of the just gods
 And difficult the various heart of man.
 And who shall reconcile aright these things,
 And understand the heart of gods and men ?

The Celts

To Marie Louise

“ And always they went forth to battle, and always they fell.”

AND evermore we sought the fight, and still
Some pale enchantment clouded all our will,
So that we faltered ; even when the foe
Lay at our sudden sword-thrust bruised and low,
As a flame dies so passed our wrath away ;
And fatal to us was the battle-day.

Yet we went willingly, for in our ears
With shrill reiteration the blind years
Taunted us with our dreams—our dreams more vain
Than on bare hills the fruitless fall of rain ;
Vain as the unaccomplished buds of Spring
Which fade and fall, and know no blossoming.

Wherefore we, being weary of the days
Which dumbly passed and left no word of praise,
And ever as the good years waned to less
Growing more weary of life's barrenness,
Strove with those dreams which bound our spirits fast,
Lest very death should prove a dream at last.

And eager in the fight we mingled ; yet
 Not as those strive, implacable, who forget
 All save the cry of the immediate hour—
 The present flush of momentary power,
 To whom the past is naught, the future dumb,
 And the old years vacant and burdensome.

We who are haunted by the ceaseless call
 Of ancient deeds and dreams perpetual,
 Which hold us in oblivious chains, and see
 Time's sure feet tread through slow eternity—
 Pilgrims who wander forth they know not where
 Towards the gates of some dim sepulchre.

Heard, the first flame of exaltation cold,
 Moan in the fight wild voices manifold,
 Which wrought confusion in our breasts, and heard
 Dread sounds and lost, as though the ages stirred ;
 And we, who vaguely struggled, stood revealed,
 Sad labourers toiling in a barren field.

And those inevitable dreams returned
 Which but a little while our souls had spurned—
 Alas ! how vainly spurned—and all things seemed
 Part of some loveliness we once had dreamed,
 And faint the battle grew, and cold and grey
 As the sky's fading at the fall of day.

So evermore we fought—and always fell ;
Yet was there no man strong enough to quell
Our passionate, sad life of love and hate ;
Ceaseless were we, and foes insatiate ;
Though one should slay us, weaponless and dim
We bade our dreams ride forth and conquer him.

Yet evermore we fell. As through the trees
Shrill Autumn wails her pitiless melodies,
And with magnificent, cold pomp of death
Fires the last leaves and stays them with her breath,
So did we fall, vanquished and overcast
By the chill breath of windy dreams at last.

Autumn

I.

WIND, what hast thou done with all our roses ?
Wind, we have no roses left to gather.
All our roses torn, and lost, and scattered.
Yet still thou roamest

With hungry eyes searching new prey ; thy moaning
Disturbs the sunless skies and desolate waters,
And breaks the sleep of seas which fain would slumber,
And fills with trouble

The listless woods which weary of thy moaning.
We are weary, wearier than the waters,
Than the grey skies and sullen seas—for all things,
All hast thou taken ;

Save a few drenched leaves and sodden grasses,
Save bent boughs and mists no sun disperses.
What wilt thou more ? Have we ought left to yield thee,
We, who are barren ?

Was the summer sweet ? We have forgotten.
Were the roses fair ? The last is taken.
All is thine, O treacherous wind—the fruitless
Desolate garden,

And the withered leaves and sodden grasses.
Wilt thou not rest ? The weary woods and waters
Are not weary of thee as we are weary.
Silence, we pray thee !

Autumn

II.

ROUND the great tower
A cold wind blows, and now
The melancholy trees
Stoop low and cower
And shake with fear—but thou
Be not as these ;
But cover thy bare walls
With glowing tapestries
Of gold and green,
And weave within thy loom
Robes meet for Summer's wear ;
Though the night has grown a tomb
And the shrinking daylight falls
Sad on the sleeping year,
With shadows and flecks of gloom
As on a sepulchre.

And cover, too, the bare walls of thy soul
With arras and with clear embroidery,
So that thou may'st forget its barrenness,
And dream that thou art fair and strong and whole,

For ah ! it were not well to see
In what deserted house,
Round which the vagrant winds of heaven press,
Yet may not even rouse
The echo of a memory,
Is held thy state ;
But for a little while
Kindle thy hearth with unfamiliar flame,
And dream that thou art no more desolate,
And that thy lips can smile,
And that to-morrow it shall be the same.

Autumn

III.

THE angry deer
Cry out beneath the shadowy trees; they know
How Death creeps on with crafty feet and slow,
Armed as a foe
Against the palsied year.
Round the dull lake
The yellow bracken and the sodden grass
Beneath a cold wind shake;
And the wood's flaming robes of yellow and red
A wind whirls shred by shred;
And many sad winds pass
Like moaning women in a place of tombs,
Who moan their dead.
And like a pall over the sullen plain,
The heavy twilight looms,
With trailing pinions damp and spoiled with rain
And the moon's light is vain.

Within his Hall,
Silent upon his throne,

An old king sits in drowsy mood,
And seems to brood and brood
Upon old deeds and dreams past all recall,
Gay and funereal.
His ancient servitors
Whisper around in half forgetfulness;
They know full well
That soon a new lord and a pitiless,
Young and implacable,
Will ride triumphant through the land, and press
Open the yielding castle doors, and stand
Lord over all
Who dwell in that lost land.
But the old king
Holds these things of less weight
Than some old dream;
Nor greatly cares
Though his foe triumphing
Shall hang him high above the castle gate
Against the Autumn sky,
Where only the hungry winds that wander by
And the sun's and the moon's beam
Shall heed him how he fares.

Autumn

IV.

THE day wanes, and the languid year
Trails her wet garments, heavier
Each hour for the never-ceasing rains,
Always more sadly. The day wanes—
But not triumphantly, as when
Like a god visible to men
She stained the burning skies with gold,
But rather as one at length grown old,
Who has no present hope and none
To-morrow, and nought to seek or shun,
Demanding nothing save a deep
And full sufficiency of sleep.
So, like a beggar, does the day,
Ashamed, tread out her luckless way.

I stand and dream, and gaze adown
The road that seeks the unknown town,
Where the glad folk pass by, and they
Are happy who know no yesterday,

Who weep but with the morning's light,
 Laugh, and their woe has wings for flight,
 Whose grief, though bitter, is not to them
 Like a ghostly diadem
 Lifted from heedless brows now dead,
 To press upon a living head,
 Nor a sure and secret heritage
 Handed from silent age to age.
 Therefore they laugh and pass adown
 The road that seeks the unknown town.

Merchants there are, with merchandise
 That shall make glad the expectant eyes
 Of kings, and tranquil pilgrims shod
 To tread the difficult ways of God;
 And women gaily robed who sing
 With the clear, sounding voice of Spring,
 Who though they shall utterly fade at last
 Will surely hold some good gift fast,
 And will most surely laugh and live,
 Whom none shall pity or forgive,
 Or at the worst they scarce shall prove
 Death worthier than life of love.

I am held as in an iron band
 By the many hills that crown my land,
 By the very ancient trees which hold
 Me, mingled with their roots and mould;
 By the long, empty gardens, where
 Scant roses bloom, and everywhere

Walk unattended the months and fill
 The indifferent garden as they will;
 By the great emptiness of my hall,
 Where vacantly my own footfall
 I hear, or the passing to and fro
 Of those who heed not the day's slow
 Passage towards night, but live and seem
 The bloodless denizens of a dream.

Ah ! hopeless bondage ! yet should I
 Being weary that the days must die,
 Leaving no fragrance on my lips,
 Seek the marts and the great ships
 And the loud clamouring market-place
 And many an unaccustomed face.
 If I should seek those antique lands
 Where Time like a grey sentry stands
 Over treasure no moth corrodes—
 Laugh and traffic on strange roads,
 And ah ! sail far in the great ships
 With the sea air salt upon my lips,
 What would ye do, ye shades that keep
 Me in this unavailing sleep ?

This ye would do—ye have wrapped round
 With metals dug in enchanted ground
 My heart, and dumb as ye are, control
 The flights and passions of my soul;
 So that howsoe'er I burn

With life insatiable, and turn
 My face away from you and ride
 Fleet steeds or climb some swift ship's side
 And gladly battle with the rain,
 Always I must return again;
 Always ye constrain me fast;
 Ye are certain of me at last.
 For in some turret gusty and cold,
 Built in perilous days of old,
 My very secret self ye keep,
 And though ye give me leave to weep
 And laugh a little and fill my eyes
 With that brief laughter that fades and dies,
 Ye care not since my strength is vain
 And always I draw to ye again.

And yet among the crowded quays,
 Where men who long for the high seas,
 Quarrel and laugh, and the wild blood
 Is all attuned to the sea's mood,
 Or when towards unfamiliar shores
 The ship sets sail, and the wind roars
 Round mast and rigging, it were well
 To see, at length made visible,
 The holy face of life unveiled.
 (Ah! me, those seas I have not sailed!)

There is a strange and pitiless song,
 Longer it is than life is long;

A lamentable song it is,
Which the wind whistles through my trees
And through my gardens. Therein complain
Voices of many ages slain,
Which will not brook forgetfulness ;
And whatever earth I press,
This song will trouble all my mind,
Like the low sobbing of the wind
Behind an arras. I may set
Heart and spirit to forget,
And even may forget, but then
On a sudden shall remember again,
And the world's glory in my hand
Will crumble to a little sand,
And as a wanderer blind and lame
To that place from where I came
I shall turn and enter the desolate
Garden and pass the castle gate,
And the glory of the world will be
Like a troublesome, faint memory,
And vain the new seed I have sowed.
Wherefore I do not tread the road
Trodden by many, which leads down
To the unknown and far-off town.

The God and the Worshipper

THE IMAGE.

THE WORSHIPPER.

SCENE: *The Shrine of a Temple.*

THE GOD.

For many months no smoke of sacrifice
Has risen before me—has thy heart forgotten,
Is then thy soul forgetful?

THE WORSHIPPER.

I, Oh Lord,
Brought still the customary sacrifice,
But dank it was and sodden with my tears,
Useless as fuel soaked through by Autumn rains,
And might not kindle. Such faint food of grief
The sacred flame consumes not.

THE GOD.

Yet no wine
Thy hands pour forth.

THE WORSHIPPER.

Behold, I have no wine,
My vineyard is down-trodden; shall I get wine
Who am wholly desolate? But I have poured

My heart's blood forth instead of wine, and now
My heart is dry.

THE GOD.

What sorrow hath sealed thy voice
That thou can'st sing no more?

THE WORSHIPPER.

All songs have flown,
Deserting me, as from a burning wood
The birds escape.

THE GOD.

And wilt thou kneel not?

THE WORSHIPPER.

Lord,
Through the dense ways and deserts of the world
Hounds have pursued me; these have seized on me,
These have lacerated and torn and wounded me,
So that I crawl on hands and feet, and lie
Prostrate and wait thy mercy. I am as one
Who on some dark and treacherous night has fallen
Over a rough cliff's edge, and motionless,
With battered, useless limbs alive with pain,
Stretched on the sand, sees nought at all but hears
The far and gentle swaying of the sea
Draw on towards him, knowing that the tide
Rising will sweep above his tortured face,
And the strong mercy of beneficent waves
Will cover him and soothe and bring him peace.

A Farewell

FRIENDS, farewell—this night the last time
We together take our pastime.
Though ye see me not to-morrow,
Yet, I pray, let no man sorrow.

I have lived with ye and proved ye,
Jested, laughed with ye, and loved ye.
Pleasant days, yet now they're over,
Farewell, friend, and farewell, lover.

Would ye hold me, would ye bind me,
In sweet fetters close, and wind me?
Nay, but where the waves are falling,
Hear ye not the sea-wind calling?

I must wander, I must wander,
Life has gold too rare to squander.
Did I pause in any city,
I should learn to crave your pity.

Ah! my friends, I dare not linger.
 Laughing Life, with lifted finger,
 Calls, and he who scorns her laughter
 Surely he shall weep hereafter.

If I stayed, my mirth would wither,
 I should be as birds which shiver
 When the Summer's wings, full-freighted,
 Pass, and they are left belated.

Deem ye, friends, that with no reason
 Season wanes and yields to season?
 Would ye keep each beauty cherished
 Till it failed and sank and perished?

Nay, while still her passing grieves ye,
 Spring, the merry lady, leaves ye.
 Would ye have her linger rather
 Till no flowers were left to gather?

Where has gone that radiant mummer,
 That delicious rogue, the Summer?
 With all speed her reign she closes,
 Lest she die with her own roses.

Sweet the days I passed among ye,
 Did I stay, I should but wrong ye,
 Ah! no sweets shall crown my staying—
 Bitter sweets of long delaying.

Pleasures of the whole world's weaving
 Round about my spirit cleaving
 Draw me forth lest I should cumber
 Soul and flesh with joys that slumber.

Ah! the roads that call and call me,
 Wanderer I, whate'er befall me.
 Would ye hold and bind me—follow
 Lighter-winged than swift or swallow.

Yea, and Love that seeks to bind me,
 Let him on the highway find me,
 Like a merry pilgrim bringing
 Fruit and wine, and songs for singing.

Battered by the winds and lonely,
 With the skies for shelter only,
 Came I to your gates—to crave ye
 Rest ; and more than rest ye gave me.

Now I crave the wild, wet weather.
 Fugitive am I for ever,
 Far-land roaming, far-sea roaming,
 Seas and lands await my coming.

Say ye, " As she came, she parted,
 Merry lipped and joyful hearted."
 Yet say not, " Her love was little,
 As the crackling hoar frost brittle."

Friends I love, no worthless lover
I, but one wind calls another.
And the winds and sea winds call me,
Wanderer I, whate'er befall me.

Rise with me and cheat to-morrow,
Pay no slavish toll to sorrow,
Let us sail on all seas, steering
With the winds for ever veering.

ERRATUM

Page 9, 4th line. For 'Moon's pale-face,' read
'Noon's pale-face.'

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